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## **Saudi Arabia**

## **Grain and Feed**

## **Saudi Arabia Lifts Restrictions on U.S. Rice**

## **2002**

Approved by:

**Quintin Gray**

**U.S. Embassy, Riyadh**

Prepared by:

Hussein Mousa

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### **Report Highlights:**

The Saudi Ministry of Commerce (MOC) lifted restrictions on U.S. rice following lead tests started on January 28. The test results came back negative and the MOC issued a press release stating that U.S. rice is safe for human consumption and can be sold freely in the Saudi market.

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Includes PSD changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
Unscheduled Report  
Riyadh [SA2], SA

## Saudi Government Lifts Restrictions on U.S. Rice

Summary: The Saudi Ministry of Commerce (MOC) lifted restrictions on U.S. rice following lead tests started on January 28. The test results came back negative and the MOC issued a press release stating that U.S. rice is safe for human consumption and can be sold freely in the Saudi market. With only a few days before the Hajj religious pilgrimage, many importers are relieved to have U.S. rice available to meet the increased demand for rice during this period.

1. On February 12, 2002, a senior Saudi Ministry of Commerce (MOC) official informed ATO/Riyadh that the MOC has completed lead tests on U.S. rice and that the results were negative. Therefore, he said that the restrictions placed on U.S. rice on January 28 are lifted and that U.S. rice should be considered safe for human consumption and sold freely on the local market. Also, the MOC official told the ATO that future U.S. rice imports and packaging materials will be tested using normal testing procedures but that the MOC will periodically do lead tests. However, since most U.S. rice sold in Saudi Arabia is packed using polypropylene bags made in Saudi Arabia per Saudi Government standards, the bags should test within acceptable lead levels. As was borne out in Japan, Korea, and now Saudi Arabia, U.S. rice normally conforms well within acceptable lead levels.

2. According to a press release issued by the MOC, its quality control laboratories conducted tests on 16 samples of U.S. rice and five packaging materials collected randomly. Following is an unofficial translation of the test results issued to local press on February 12:

*3. **Quote** Results of analysis and laboratory tests of these samples revealed that it is fit for human consumption and conforms with the internationally approved standard specifications and that it falls within safe limits (levels) in rice samples where it was found to be between/0.01 parts per million (ppm) and 0.07 ppm/whereas the maximum lead level in grains according to the Food Constitution Committee/Codex Alimentarius/ is 0.2 ppm. As far as bags are concerned the level was found at/0.05 ppm in jute bags and 10 ppm in polypropylene bags/ whereas the maximum lead level in bags according to Japanese specifications is 100 ppm. End Quote*

4. It is worth noting that the MOC conducted the lead tests in response to claims that tainted U.S. rice had been found in Japan, and of a reported ban by the Government of South Korea (see GAIN Report #SA2006). Within a few days, U.S. rice in both Japan and Korea was tested and found to have acceptable lead levels and deemed safe for human consumption.

5. Saudi importers of American rice were very pleased with the timing of the MOC's decision to lift restrictions on U.S. rice. The demand for rice has started to sharply increase due to the approaching Hajj season (pilgrimage to Mecca) due to the arrival of large numbers of pilgrims to the Kingdom. Traditionally the demand for rice reaches its climax one month before and one month after Hajj as a result of arrival of more than two million Muslims to Mecca to perform Hajj and heavy use of rice in Eid festivities. This year's Hajj coincides with February 20-24.

END OF REPORT